

Message Text

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C O N F I D E N T I A L STATE 069015

EXDIS

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: SHUM, PFOR, NU, MASS

SUBJECT: HUMAN RIGHTS: UNDER SECRETARY BENSON'S MARCH 24
TESTIMONY

1. FOLLOWING IS THE TRANSCRIPT OF THE SECTION OF MRS.
BENSON'S TESTIMONY BEFORE THE LONG SUBCOMMITTEE OF THE
HOUSE APPROPRIATIONS COMMITTEE WHICH DEALS WITH NICARAGUA:

2. BEGIN TEXT: "NOW, MY QUESTION TO YOU IS, WOULD YOU
GIVE US YOUR EVALUATION ON BEHALF OF THE STATE DEPARTMENT
AS TO THE STATE OF REPRESSION AND HUMAN RIGHTS IN NIC-
ARAGUA?"

"MRS. BENSON. OUR KNOWLEDGE OF THE STATE OF HUMAN RIGHTS
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AND REPRESSION IN NICARAGUA IS IN OUR REPORT, WHICH WE
TRANSMITTED TO YOU. THERE IS NO QUESTION ABOUT IT, IT IS
NOT GOOD. IN FACT, THE ADMINISTRATION HAS COMMUNICATED
OUR CONCERNS ON THE SUBJECT OF HUMAN RIGHTS SPECIFICALLY
TO THE HIGHEST LEVEL OF THE NICARAGUAN GOVERNMENT FOUR
TIMES SINCE JANUARY, THROUGH OUR EMBASSIES AND THROUGH
CONTACTS IN WASHINGTON.

"MR. KOCH. NOW, IF THE STATE OF AFFAIRS IS AS I HAVE
READ TO YOU FROM TIME MAGAZINE, AND THEY ARE QUOTING THE

CATHOLIC BISHOPS OF NICARAGUA, DO YOU THINK THAT WE OUGHT TO BE PROVIDING MILITARY AID TO NICARAGUA?

"MRS. BENSON. IF OUR DECISION TO PROVIDE MILITARY AID IN THE CASE OF NICARAGUA -- OF COURSE, IT IS MILITARY TRAINING IN THAT CASE, AND FMS FINANCING -- IF OUR DECISION WERE BASED SOLELY ON HUMAN RIGHTS CONCERNS, I WOULD SAY NO WITHOUT THE SLIGHTEST --

"MR. KOCH. WHAT IS IT BASED ON?

"MRS. BENSON. IT IS BASED ON OUR PERCEPTION THAT IT IS IN OUR NATIONAL INTEREST TO MAINTAIN PEACE AND FRIENDLY RELATIONS WITH THE NATIONS TO THE SOUTH OF US.

"MR. KOCH. WHY DON'T WE, ON THAT SAME BASIS, GIVE ARMS TO THE SOVIET UNION, IF WE WANT TO MAINTAIN RELATIONSHIPS WITH ANOTHER COUNTRY? IN OTHER WORDS, WHAT I AM SAYING IS, YOU ARE NOT SUGGESTING THAT THERE IS A NATIONAL SECURITY INGREDIENT HERE, IS THAT RIGHT?

"MRS. BENSON. NO, I AM NOT.

"MR. KOCH. SO, IT IS SIMPLY THE MAINTENANCE OF FRIENDLY RELATIONS, IS THAT RIGHT?
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"MRS. BENSON, THAT IS RIGHT. WITH THE EXCEPTION THAT ONE HAS TO GO BACK TO THESE THINGS HISTORICALLY. IF THERE COMES A TIME TO CHANGE THE POLICY, ONE CAN CHANGE IT, IF YOU WANT TO THINK IT THROUGH AND DO IT IN A SENSIBLE FASHION. BUT, THE POLICY HAS BEEN FOR, I SUPPOSE AT LEAST ALL OF THIS CENTURY, TO MAINTAIN THESE FRIENDLY RELATIONS.

"WE HAVE SINCE THE EARLY 1920S PROVIDED ONE KIND OR ANOTHER OF MILITARY ASSISTANCE AND TRAINING UNDER TREATIES -- I THINK THERE WAS ONE IN 1922. WE HAVE THOUGHT IT ADVISABLE, I PRESUME, TO MAINTAIN THESE RELATIONSHIPS BECAUSE IT WAS HEMISPHERICALLY A GOOD IDEA -- SINCE OBVIOUSLY WHAT GOES ON SOUTH OF OUR BORDER IS OF INTEREST TO US.

"I THINK THAT IS THE BASIS FOR THIS POLICY. I DON'T SEE HOW ANYBODY AT THE PRESENT TIME ANYWAY COULD SAY THAT THIS IS A MATTER OF NATIONAL SECURITY. AT SOME TIME OR ANOTHER IN THE PAST IT MIGHT HAVE BEEN SO. THERE HAVE BEEN A LOT OF CONFLAGRATIONS IN THAT PART OF THE WORLD, WHICH IT COULD TURN OUT TO BE, WORST POSSIBLE CASE -- WOULD TURN OUT TO BE AGAINST OUR NATIONAL SECURITY. BUT, OTHER THAN THAT, I AGREE.

MR. KOCH. I WILL PURSUE IT IN THE NEXT ROUND, MR. CHAIRMAN.

"MR. LONG. IT IS ESPECIALLY OF INTEREST TO US WHEN TWO FRIENDS OF OURS, TWO COUNTRIES EACH FRIENDLY TO US, ARE CUTTING EACH OTHER'S THROATS WITH OUR WEAPONS, WHICH HAS HAPPENED MANY, MANY TIMES.

"THE LADY FROM NEBRASKA IS RECOGNIZED FOR FIVE MINUTES.

"MRS. SMITH. MRS. BENSON, MR. DUNCAN, WE APPRECIATE YOU BEING HERE. LET ME PURSUE A LITTLE BIT THIS HUMAN RIGHTS
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POLICY.

"I THINK THAT ONCE WE HAVE MADE THE OBSERVANCE OF HUMAN RIGHTS A PART OF OUR FOREIGN POLICY, THEN PROBABLY WE WOULD BE CARRYING IT ALL THE WAY. I AM WONDERING ABOUT THE FACT THAT THE CARTER ADMINISTRATION HAS RECOMMENDED INCREASING...END TEXT. (QUESTIONING GOES ON TO ANOTHER TOPIC. PORTION ON NICARAGUA BEGINS AGAIN AS FOLLOWS.)

BEGIN TEXT: "MR. KOCH. NOW, MRS. BENSON, I WOULD LIKE TO TAKE US BACK TO NICARAGUA. I HAVE A FEELING ALMOST OF DEJA VU, IN A SENSE, BECAUSE LAST YEAR WHEN WE WERE TALKING ABOUT URUGUAY AND NICARAGUA, AT THAT TIME THE PERSON APPEARING ON BEHALF OF THE STATE DEPARTMENT SAID THAT THERE WAS NO VIOLATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS IN THOSE COUNTRIES ON ANY SCALE. AND WE HAD TO FIGHT, SO TO SPEAK, AGAINST THE STATE DEPARTMENT ITSELF IN ORDER TO CUT OFF AID TO URUGUAY. AND THIS YEAR, AS WE TALKED ABOUT IT BEFORE, THE SECRETARY CAME IN AND SAID THAT THEY WERE NOT TO PROVIDE MILITARY SALES TO THREE COUNTRIES, ONE OF WHICH WAS URUGUAY.

"NOW, WITH RESPECT TO NICARAGUA, YOU HAVE ALREADY INDICATED THAT YOU THINK THAT THERE IS REPRESSION IN NICARAGUA.
DID I HEAR YOU CORRECTLY?

"MRS. BENSON. YES, SIR.

"MR. KOCH. NOW, I WANT TO JUST RECITE FROM THE NEW YORK TIMES, MARCH 1. "SUSPECTS ARE SUBJECTED TO 'HUMILIATING AND INHUMAN TREATMENT RANGING FROM TORTURE AND RAPE TO SUMMARY EXECUTION. MANY VILLAGES HAVE BEEN ABANDONED WITH HOMES BURNED AND INHABITANTS FORCED TO FLEE. ACCORDING TO CHURCH SOURCES, A NATIONAL GUARD PATROL WITH THE CODE NAME HILARIO, COMPOSED OF ONE OFFICER, SEVEN 'POLICE JUDGES' OR SHERIFFS, AND ABOUT A DOZEN SOLDIERS EXECUTED

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FOUR MEN, ELEVEN WOMEN AND TWENTY-NINE CHILDREN, INCLUDING SOME ONE AND TWO-YEARS OLD. AFTER THE VICTIMS WERE BURIED IN A MASS GRAVE, THEIR LAND WAS DIVIDED UP AMONG THE 'POLICE JUDGES'. PRISONERS ARE FREQUENTLY SUSPENDED BY THEIR FINGERS OR THUMBS AND BEATEN IN THE STOMACH OR FORCED TO SWALLOW A BUTTON ATTACHED TO A STRING THAT IS THEN TUGGED VIOLENTLY."

"THAT'S PRETTY BAD AND GRUESOME, WOULDN'T YOU AGREE?

"MRS. BENSON. I AGREE.

"MR. KOCH. THE JUSTIFICATIONS THAT YOU HAVE PROVIDED US WITH JUSTIFYING THE PROGRAM -- AND THE PROGRAM CONSISTS OF 600,000 DOLLARS IN TRAINING AND 2.5 MILLION DOLLARS IN SALES UNDER THIS PROGRAM -- IS THAT RIGHT?

"MRS. BENSON. I AM SURE IT IS. YES, THAT IS RIGHT.

"MR. KOCH. NOW THE JUSTIFICATIONS WHICH YOU HAVE PROVIDED US WITH ARE SHORT, SO LET ME READ THEM. NOW, THIS IS YOUR STATEMENT TO US, APPEARING IN THE MATERIAL PROVIDED TO US.

"WHILE THE UNITED STATES SECURITY INTERESTS IN NICARAGUA ARE LIMITED, WE HAVE AN INTEREST IN MAINTAINING THE COOPERATIVE POLITICAL RELATIONSHIP WE ENJOY WITH THAT COUNTRY. NICARAGUA HAS CONSISTENTLY SUPPORTED U.S. POSITIONS IN THE UN, THE ORGANIZATION OF AMERICAN STATES AND OTHER INTERNATIONAL FORA. THE MAINTENANCE OF STABILITY IN THE CENTRAL AMERICAN REGION IS ALSO IN OUR INTEREST. OUR SECURITY ASSISTANCE RELATIONSHIP WITH NICARAGUA HELPS TO PROMOTE THOSE INTERESTS THROUGH THE MAINTENANCE OF MEANINGFUL CONTACTS WITH THE NICARAGUAN NATIONAL GUARD, WHICH IS EXPECTED TO CONTINUE TO PLAY A SIGNIFICANT ROLE IN THE POLITICAL EVOLUTION OF THAT COUNTRY. OUR TRAINING PROGRAM IS ALSO INTENDED TO PROMOTE A GREATER DEGREE OF PROFESSION-CONFIDENTIAL

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ALISM WITHIN THE NATIONAL GUARD. IT IS ALSO IN THE U.S. INTEREST TO RESPOND FAVORABLY TO REASONABLE REQUESTS FOR THE PURCHASE OF MILITARY EQUIPMENT."

"WELL, IF WE HAVE REACHED THE POINT WHERE WE CONCEDE THAT THERE IS REPRESSION -- AND THAT WAS NOT CONCEDED LAST YEAR -- FORTUNATELY IT IS CONCEDED THIS YEAR -- AND THE JUSTIFICATIONS ARE THOSE WHICH I HAVE READ, HOW CAN WE EVER END A PROGRAM TO A REPRESSIVE COUNTRY IN LATIN AMERICA? WOULDN'T THAT JUSTIFICATION APPLY TO EVERY SINGLE COUNTRY?

AFTER ALL, WHAT IS THE JUSTIFICATION? THAT WE HAVE AN INTEREST IN MAINTAINING A COOPERATIVE POLITICAL RELATIONSHIP, WE WANT TO UPGRADE IN THIS CASE THE NICARAGUAN

NATIONAL GUARD AND MAKE IT MORE PROFESSIONAL. IS THAT A JUSTIFICATION FOR THE KIND OF HEINOUS TORTURE OF NICARAGUANS TAKING PLACE IN NICARAGUA BY THE VERY NICARAGUAN NATIONAL GUARD THAT WE ARE SUPPORTING WITH THIS ASSISTANCE? WOULD YOU JUSTIFY THAT?

"MRS. BENSON. NO, I WOULD NOT.

"MR. KOCH. THEN WHY ARE WE DOING THIS?

"MRS. BENSON. I THINK WE ARE DOING IT BECAUSE WE HAVE ALWAYS DONE IT. . .

"MR. KOCH. IS THAT THE ANSWER.

"MRS. BENSON. YES. I THINK IT IS AN HISTORICAL ANSWER. IT IS SOMETHING WE HAVE DONE FOR MANY, MANY YEARS. THAT DOES NOT MEAN TO SAY THAT I AGREE WITH IT, OR THAT THIS ADMINISTRATION AGREES WITH IT.

"MR. LONG. WHAT WOULD BE THE REACTION OF THE STATE DEPARTMENT IF THIS COMMITTEE WERE TO SUSPEND ALL AID TO NICARAGUA, CONFIDENTIAL

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IN VIEW OF SOME OF THE GROSS VIOLATIONS OF HUMAN RIGHTS THAT HAVE TAKEN PLACE THERE? WHAT WOULD BE LOST TO THE UNITED STATES, WHAT WOULD BE A VIOLATION OF OUR SECURITY INTERESTS?

"MRS. BENSON. I CANNOT THINK OF A SINGLE THING. . .
(SEE BELOW)

"MR. LONG. VERY GOOD. SO --

- -

"MR. KOCH. STOP WHILE YOU'RE AHEAD, MR. CHAIRMAN.

"MR. LONG. I THINK YOU'RE RIGHT. I WILL STOP THERE.

"MR. KOCH. I WILL STOP AT THAT POINT, TOO.

"MR. LONG. NOW, I HAVE A NUMBER OF QUESTIONS TO ASK ON THE WHOLE QUESTION OF HUMAN RIGHTS.

"IN LIGHT OF THE STATEMENTS MADE BY THE PRESIDENT, SECRETARY VANCE, REGARDING THE HUMAN RIGHTS ISSUE, WHY ARE YOU PROPOSING SECURITY ASSISTANCE PROGRAMS IN FISCAL '78 FOR THE FOLLOWING COUNTRIES WHICH HAVE BEEN CITED, I BELIEVE

DOCUMENTED, AS HAVING BEEN GROSS VIOLATORS OF HUMAN RIGHTS.

"MR. YATES. MR. CHAIRMAN, WOULD YOU YIELD JUST A SECOND. I JUST WANTED TO FIND OUT FROM THE WITNESS WHY SHE MADE NO

... END TEXT. (QUESTIONING GOES ON TO ANOTHER TOPIC.
PORTION ON NICARAGUA BEGINS AGAIN AS FOLLOWS.)

BEGIN TEXT: "MRS. BENSON. I WONDER IF I MIGHT MAKE A
COMMENT, TO GET BACK TO SOMETHING YOU WERE TALKING OF
EARLIER, STILL ON THE SAME SUBJECT. AND THAT IS ABOUT THE
COUNTRIES, SOME OF THOSE WHOSE NAMES YOU READ OFF, AND WHO
HAVE BIG HUMAN RIGHTS PROBLEMS AND WHO ARE STILL IN THE
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PROPOSED BUDGET.

(SEE BELOW)

"THE STATE DEPARTMENT WOULD FEEL THAT IT WOULD BE A MISTAKE
TO TAKE ANY PRE-EMPTIVE BUDGETARY ACTION AT THIS TIME WHICH
WOULD LIMIT OUR FLEXIBILITY IN DEALING WITH THESE GOVERN-
MENTS. AND I REALLY WOULD LIKE TO ASK YOU, MR. CHAIRMAN,
TO CONSIDER THE POSSIBILITY THAT IT WOULD BE A BETTER
COURSE OF ACTION AT THE PRESENT TIME TO GIVE US THE TIME TO
WORK WITH THESE COUNTRIES, TO SEE WHETHER WE CAN MAKE MORE
PROGRESS. THERE ARE THINGS WHICH HAVE HAPPENED, JUST SINCE
THE PRESIDENT HAS BEGUN TO TALK SO MUCH ABOUT HUMAN RIGHTS,
THAT I THINK WHAT WE WOULD LIKE IS TO HAVE THE POSSIBILITY
STILL OPEN TO US FOR MAINTAINING TIES WHICH WE HAVE HIS-
TORICALLY HAD WITH MANY COUNTRIES OVER MANY, MANY DECADES,
AND NOT TO HAVE THEM INSTANTLY CHANGED SINCE IN A SENSE
THEY ARE PROBABLY NO WORSE THAN THEY WERE LAST YEAR ON
HUMAN RIGHTS, AND SUDDENLY WE RISE UP AND START REMOVING
ALL KINDS OF SECURITY ASSISTANCE, SUPPORTING ASSISTANCE,
WHICH COULD CREATE MORE OF AN UPHEAVAL THAN WE MIGHT
WISH TO CREATE. AND I WOULD ASK YOU TO CONSIDER THE POSSI-
BILITY OF LEAVING THAT FLEXIBILITY UNTIL WE HAVE A LITTLE
MORE TIME TO WORK ON IT.

"MR. LONG. WELL, I WAS DELIGHTED WHEN YOU NODDED YOUR
HEAD A LITTLE BIT BEFORE. BUT YOU SORT OF LOST ME IN THE
LAST FEW MINUTES. I CAN'T SEE THAT WE STAND FOR ANYTHING
IF IT IS MERE RHETORIC. I THINK THAT IS THE GREAT PROBLEM.
MANY PEOPLE JUST THINK THIS IS RHETORIC, WHEN WE SAY WE
THINK HUMAN RIGHTS IS A BIG FACTOR. IT IS ONLY RHETORIC
UNLESS WE DO SOMETHING. AND THAT IS WHERE THE APPROPRIA-
TIONS COMMITTEE OF THE UNITED STATES CONGRESS -- THAT IS
WHERE WE STAND. WE ARE THE PEOPLE WHO CAN PUT TEETH IN IT.
THAT HAS BEEN THE VERY BEGINNING, THE INSTRUMENT OF DEMOC-
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RACY -- APPROPRIATIONS.

"MRS. BENSON. I AGREE WITH YOU." (END TEXT)

2. ALTHOUGH MRS. BENSON'S TESTIMONY WAS GIVEN IN PUBLIC SESSION, IT HAS NOT, YET, APPEARED IN THE PRESS. ASSUME AMBASSADOR WILL ONLY WANT TO USE THIS ON AN IF ASKED BASIS.

3. THE FOREIGN OPERATIONS SUBCOMMITTEE OF THE HOUSE APPROPRIATIONS COMMITTEE (LONG'S SUBCOMMITTEE) HAS INFORMED US THAT THEY WILL HOLD A SPECIAL HEARING ON HUMAN RIGHTS IN PHILIPPINES AND NICARAGUA ON APRIL 5. CONGRESSMAN KOCH, WHO IS A MEMBER OF THAT SUBCOMMITTEE, HAS INFORMED US THAT HE WILL USE THIS OCCASION TO URGE THE TERMINATION OF BOTH MILITARY AND ECONOMIC AID TO NICARAGUA IN VIEW OF THE HUMAN RIGHTS AND CORRUPTION RECORD OF THE NICARAGUAN GOVERNMENT.
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